

# Major Review of the Australian Standard Classification of Languages (ASCL)

## Scope of Review

Commencing in 2023, the ABS is embarking on a major review of ASCL. The updated ASCL is currently scheduled for release in October 2024. Changes to the [Language Standards](#) are being considered in the [2026 Census Topic Consultation](#) process which is a separate process to the Language Review.

To understand the need for the ASCL review, the ABS has undertaken a range of research and analysis, including:

- Feedback already received from individuals and organisations.
- Research into how people have responded to the Language questions in previous Censuses.
- Issues identified through standard classification maintenance processes, including consideration of the classification criteria.
- Comparison with other Language classifications used by demographically similar countries and organisations (e.g. StatsCan and StatsNZ).

This research has informed the framing of the initial areas in-scope of this review as outlined below.

The ABS invites you to provide feedback on the initial areas proposed as in-scope of this ASCL review (i.e. whether you consider these areas as a high or low priority). In addition, the ABS invites you to provide feedback on any other key areas of concern that should be included in the ASCL review that are not already outlined below.

### In-scope

#### **1. Investigation into the creation of new 4-digit groups (Languages) in the ASCL**

The ABS has received feedback regarding languages not currently identified at the 4-digit level in the ASCL. In consultation with stakeholders, it is proposed that this review investigates whether new Languages (4 digit groups) should be created, to better reflect languages spoken in Australia.

#### **2. Appropriate representation of existing Languages (4-digit groups) in ASCL.**

The ABS has received feedback about the spelling of some Languages. In consultation with stakeholders, it is proposed that the spelling of Languages be reviewed for accuracy.

#### **3. Investigation into how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (Broad Group 8) are represented in the ASCL.**

A number of issues have been identified with the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are represented in the ASCL, including:

- Many languages are not well represented within the ASCL. The review will investigate Languages in Broad Group 8 for accuracy. In addition, the treatment of new languages (i.e. Creoles and Pidgins) will be investigated, across the ASCL.
- There are significant inconsistencies with the treatment of language dialects.

In addition, some groups within Broad Group 8 have two- and three-digit Narrow Groups. The current code structure could be investigated to determine whether both types of Narrow Groups are required.

It is proposed that this review investigates these issues, in consultation with relevant communities and other stakeholders.

#### **4. Investigation into representation of sign languages and signed languages in the ASCL**

There are broadly two main types of signing systems: the first are those that are languages in their own right, with distinct grammar and vocabulary, compared with spoken languages (e.g. sign languages such as Auslan). The second are those that directly represent a spoken language (e.g. signed English), broadly referred to as signed languages.

Currently the classification includes sign languages as a Narrow Group (97) within the Group 9 *Other Languages* Broad Group. The ASCL does not currently include signed languages.

In consultation with stakeholders, it is proposed that this review investigates:

- Are there any sign languages currently missing from the ASCL?
- Is there a need to include signed languages (those that directly represent a spoken language) in the ASCL?

If this area was included in the review, it would also be important to consider the management of Indigenous sign languages.

#### **5. Investigation into the structure of Broad Group 9, Other Languages**

In the Classification, Broad Group 9, *Other Languages* consists of varied narrow groupings that are not necessarily connected to each other (such as American Languages and Sign Languages). In consultation with communities and stakeholders, it is proposed that this review investigates if current groupings in Broad Group 9 continue to reflect user need and current Australian society.

### **Out of scope**

#### **Investigation into the associated Language Standards**

The ASCL is designed to be used in the collection, aggregation and dissemination of data relating to language usage in Australia and to classify the language variables contained within the Language Standards.

Changes to the [Language Standards](#) are being considered in the [2026 Census Topic Consultation](#) process which is a separate process to the Language Review.

### **Changes to the underpinning conceptual content to include updated definitions for languages and dialects.**

The current concept underpinning the language classification and standards is based on the Macquarie Dictionary definition of language. The ABS has no plans to change the underlying concept of the language classification and standards.

### **Investigation of or changes to other, related classifications**

Several other classifications are closely related to the language classification: Standard Australian Classification of Countries (SACC), Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ASCCEG) and Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG). During the Language Review, issues may be identified that also affect these three other classifications. Where this occurs, issues will be documented for consideration in future reviews of these related classifications.

The ASCRG is currently under review. More detailed information outlining the scope of the ASCRG review, including timeframes, is available on the [ABS Consultation Hub](#).

The ABS anticipates undertaking reviews of the other related classifications prior to the 2026 Census. Further detail will be made available on the ABS website in coming months.

### **Further information**

For further information, regarding the current classification, please see the links below:

- [Australian Standard Classification of Languages, 2016|Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)
- The full classification can be found in the Data downloads section of the *Australian Standard Classification of Languages 2016*, webpage (linked above). It is also available here (Table 1.3):



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For additional information, please email the ABS at: [standards@abs.gov.au](mailto:standards@abs.gov.au)